

2015 State of the City Address

Welcome. What a pleasure it is to have so many city residents, council members, media, and chamber representatives join us this evening. All of us here would like to say thank you to the Chamber CEO Raymond Burns, his staff, and the Chamber Board of Directors for coordinating with the sponsors that provided all of the refreshments this evening. I would also like to take a moment to welcome my wife Lisa and my two daughters, Emily and Haley.

Members of the Rogers City Council, Honorable City Clerk Peggy David, Honorable Judge Paul Bridges, city directors, city employees, my fellow citizens, it is my honor and privilege to present to you the State of the City.

I am pleased to share with you a recap of successes from 2014, and present to you the exciting possibilities and goals for 2015. Growth and vigor is evident throughout the city of Rogers. The Arkansas Tech Business Index shows that our great city leads the state in best monthly labor and market gains.

Last year, our sales tax revenue reached \$14.8 million dollars. This represents a 5% increase over the record set in 2013. There were also incremental property tax, business license, and franchise fee increases. From January to November, more than 1,000 new jobs were created in Rogers. Unemployment dropped from 6% to 4.6%, which is well below the state average of 5.3%.

Private investors spent more than \$70 million dollars in Rogers last year. Development and investment continues to reap tangible benefits for our city. When private investment is coupled with sales tax revenue, along with the remaining funds of the 2011 Bond Issue, the city will continue to improve transportation and mobility. These metrics point to the advancement we all see happening in the City of Rogers.

Our skyline will soon include the tallest building in Northwest Arkansas, the ten story Hunt Tower, offering 225,000 square feet of Class A office. Nearby, the Walmart Arkansas Music Pavilion proved to be a first-class entertainment venue after a stellar opening season.

Thousands of people attended the AMP last year, including many visitors from surrounding states. There is an overwhelming buzz about the 2015 concert season, which already includes Kenny Chesney and The Dave Matthews Band.

As “ground zero” for retail development, Gear Head Outfitters, Chuy’s Tex Mex, Longhorn’s Steakhouse, Indian Motorcycles, and Designer Shoe Warehouse are a few of the businesses that opened last year, along the I-49 corridor. A few other developments in our area included High Rise Trampoline Park, The Shoppes at Pleasant Crossing, and Foster’s Pint and Plate. This year, we will see more dining amenities added to our city, such as Whataburger and Pei Wei (Pay Way). In downtown Rogers, Mercy Medical Clinic, Brickstreet Brew Pub, Levi’s, and Rush Running are some of the establishments that joined the scene last year.

I believe downtown is the soul of a city. Through private and public collaboration, Rogers will continue to be a beautiful, interesting, and economically vibrant destination for people who want a better place to live, work, and play. Already this year, Parkside Burgers began their business on First Street. It is exciting to be part of the new developments in downtown Rogers.

Gateway Planning will navigate this most exciting project. The final plans to revitalize and expand our historic downtown district take shape from information provided by the citizens of Rogers. Overtime, a concept to preserve the historic appearance and to repurpose the district for developments will cater to those living and working in the downtown area.

Local architect and history expert, John Mack, is investing in the renovation of the Opera House on Walnut Street and the former Hunt Building. Many others, like my own family, are building or renovating homes that surround the historic district. These and other projects will continue to diversify the character of our city.

Rogers is priming for the future, with the help of engaged citizens, along with the 450 committed public servants, our City would neither be what it is, nor hope to become, without the commitment of these two groups.

Annually, department directors provide an impressive list of accomplishments and goals, which I am going to share with you tonight.

The City Clerk's office collected 1,950 business licenses renewals and 335 new applications in 2014. The advertising and promotion tax was up over 8% compared to 2013. These numbers are a good indicator of a growing economy and an expanding population.

Rogers launched its new website, www.rogersar.gov in 2014 and later this year we will also launch a new community development system, CityView, to provide workflow automation between several departments utilizing field devices to help us improve our efficiency and customer service. City View represents a gold standard in modern cities, allowing us to fully connect with our citizens and businesses by using the latest computer technology.

The Human Resource Department developed, with the council's approval, a comprehensive employee policy manual for the first time in 30 years.

An online open benefits enrollment program was initiated in November, which improved employee productivity and reduced overtime. The city also opted to provide employees with a partially self-insured health insurance program providing a stronger medical plan and lower administrative cost.

The Rogers Recycling Center continues to serves thousands of residents, and over 250 schools and businesses every week. This amounts to processing 1,500 tons of recyclable material, to include 55 tons of plastic, 280 tons of glass and 567 tons of cardboard. This year, the department will coordinate with the Benton County Hazardous Waste facility to offer a Saturday drop-off service for hazardous household waste.

Over 3,100 notices or letters of code violations were issued in 2014. Code Enforcement will continue to address violations, illegal signage, and graffiti to improve the city's appearance in 2015.

Last Year, the Building Inspection department issued 43 new commercial building permits, valued at \$75.4 million dollars. Commercial remodel and addition permits increased to 199, valued at \$28.5 million. Additionally, new single-family residential permits totaled \$67.3 million.

Our four legged friends were treated well by Rogers Animal Services. The Rogers Animal Control received 4,937 calls in 2014 and received more than \$230,000 in donations. The shelter was one of three in the Nation to receive a \$50,000 donation from Purina Cat Chow for improvements to the feline living space, including a newly built "catio."

Of the 1,239 animals housed by the shelter last year, only 94 were euthanized, the lowest number in the history of Rogers Animal Services. The Rogers shelter, through an inter-local agreement, also serves as the shelter for the Bentonville area.

This past year saw continued excellence and hard work from the men and women of the Rogers Fire Department. Breaking records for the number of training hours, smoke detector installations, citizen interactions, and four new fire apparatus were essential ingredients for an improvement in the city's fire safety rating. Our new ISO rating of 1, is the best rating possible.

Rogers is the only 1 ISO rated city in Arkansas and one of only three cities in America that has an ISO rating of 1 and a dual accreditation in both Fire and EMT. This achievement is expected to save our businesses and citizens approximately 5% on their annual hazard insurance premiums.

It has taken nearly five years, but an agreement with the Benton County Quorum Court and the City to provide an adequate funding stream was established for rural ambulance service, which allowed for additional firefighters and paramedics to the benefit of both the city and county.

The department also implemented PulsePoint, a smart phone application, which notifies CPR-trained civilians of a nearby heart attack. Rogers continues to boast one of the lowest property loss rates and highest heart attack survival rates in the multi-state region. This year will include the opening of the new Fire Station 2, a new ambulance, and hosting the regional fire academy.

The Police Department enacted a variety of improvements in 2014, including the addition of a domestic violence coordinator, upgrading Toughbook computers for the entire patrol fleet, which gives officers a better platform to provide service to our residents, upgrading the 911 recording system, and a customized SWAT vehicle was put into service. Last year, our officers responded to 31,605 calls for service, which is an average of 87 calls per day, all while maintaining a high clearance rate of 82% for property crimes and 85% for violent crimes, compared to the national average of 40%.

Police Department goals for this year include increasing their field interview reports by 10 % and reducing the number of accidents by 10% at 10 of the most hazardous intersections in the City. Also, the department will continue their efforts to recruit the best and brightest new officers to ensure the overall long-term success of serving our ever-growing community.

Despite one of the worst winters in recent history, the Rogers Municipal Airport at Carter Field marked an increase of activity in 2014, as evidenced by the 5% increase in fuel flowage fees, a primary source of revenue. Through financial support from friends and partners at the Federal Aviation Administration and Arkansas Department of Aeronautics Commission, the airport began a \$3.6 million dollar project to reconstruct two aprons.

The Airport also plans to develop a new marketing and branding strategy in 2015.

Several programs and events are scheduled this year to celebrate the Rogers Historical Museum's 40th anniversary! More than 1,100 objects were recently added to the museum's collection. The Arkansas Preservation program matched a \$10,000 grant to install energy efficient storm windows at the annex to preserve the original 1919 post office windows. After hosting over 98,000 visitors and school children last year, plans to launch a new volunteer program, exhibit topics, and special living history presentations are in the works.

The Rogers Public Library served over 233,000 city and county visitors last year. As promised, nearly 8,000 eCards were distributed to students and teachers. Now, middle and high school students enrolled in the Rogers School District may use online library services from any location with Internet access. The library also partnered with the Care-A-Child program to provide reading and math tutoring for elementary age students.

Plans to increase outreach at schools and early childhood facilities are in the plans for 2015. Additional support for job seekers, more online resources, a small recording room, portable media lab, music streaming, self-serve kiosks, and book return at the Rogers Activity Center are in progress for 2015.

Our Recreation Department keeps the ball rolling by operating one of the largest most comprehensive public sports programs in the State by running 109 separate youth and adult sports leagues. The Arkansas Recreation and Parks Association named our adult softball league “Program of the Year” and Lena Sneary as “Young Professional of the Year”. This year, the department’s goals are to expand offerings such as sand volleyball, girl’s fall softball, kickball, and lacrosse. Additionally, in 2015, they will schedule almost 4,000 games.

The Adult Wellness Center increased their revenue by 20% last year. With the membership rate change, this represents a 43% increase in membership revenue compared to 2013.

Out of the center’s 10,000 members, between 900 and 1,400 people a day use the facility. As of January this year, over 21,000 people have joined the center since opening in 2006.

The center was proud to be selected by the University of Arkansas to participate in several fitness research programs. During the United Way “Day of Caring,” over twenty people assisted the center with landscaping projects and a variety of class activities. The center will continue efforts to partner with community businesses to enhance programming, activities, and events in 2015.

In its second year of operation, the Rogers Aquatic Center safely welcomed 110,000 visitors and was awarded the “Arkansas Business of Distinction” honor in the category of tourism development.

Last year, almost 10 miles of soft trails in and around Lake Atalanta were constructed by the Parks Department. If you haven’t already checked out these trails, I highly encourage you to do so. Once completed, Lake Atalanta will be the envy of other municipalities, with a natural spring-fed lake for fishing as the centerpiece.

Biking and hiking trails, a rustic playground, an overlook, picnic areas, and paved trails around the lake are a few of the anticipated amenities.

The Bike Park on Cherry Street is scheduled for completion this year, along with another trail connecting it to Lake Atalanta. Other trails will soon connect downtown and the rest of the city creating safe paths for residents and visitors.

Other completed Parks Department projects include the multi-purpose, synthetic turf field and soccer complex at Veteran's Park; construction of the Mercy trailhead restroom and parking lot; Rogers Razorback Regional Greenway; 3.4 miles of Blossom Way Trail; and additional parking at the Aquatics Center.

This year, expected completions include phase 1 designs of Farms Trail; Signature Bridge at New Hope Road and Interstate 49; the northern loop trail connecting downtown; the re-routing of Village on the Creek Trails; and construction of the Veteran's Park soccer complex.

Without a doubt, vehicular and pedestrian mobility is a priority in Rogers. The Planning and Transportation Department have been burning the candle at both ends with construction, design, and project management of the \$100 million dollar traffic improvement program in addition to the normal work of these departments. From in-house overlay and drainage work, the downtown sidewalk rehab project, added parking at the Aquatics Center to Multi-million dollar projects such as; Perry Road, Pinnacle Hills Parkway, and Monte Ne these men and women work hard and deserve our thanks. A more expanded list of the scope of work in Planning and Transportation will be on the City's website later this week.

After surviving one of the worst winters in fifty years, we have taken steps to insure an even better winter weather response plan than before. Since taking office in 2011, I have added equipment, expanded the use of chemical applications, and added the ability to dispatch private contractors to supplement our staff. In the past we have hand mixed 50lb. bags of salt with sand and/or chemicals manually.

Very soon the construction of a 65' x 100' salt dome will be completed which will house thousands of tons of loose salt, sand, and chemicals that can be mixed with front end loaders. This will greatly improve the efficiency of our response efforts.

As you can see, Rogers is moving forward in several directions to provide the services and protection our residents want and deserve. The city is poised and ready for the future. I believe 2015 is going to provide residents with more options, better streets, and expanded amenities with no tax increases. There is a lot to do, and many goals to accomplish, but we are up to the task as long as the citizens continue to support the city as they have in the past, because we know Rogers is truly... where possible lives...

Thank you.

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